

“What is knowledge?” and “How do we know?” *

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The questions “What is knowledge?” and “How do we know?” are of central importance to the formation of a coherent understanding of experience. I believe the simple application of logic is enough to answer these questions. Though various attempts, to varying degrees of success, have been undertaken by humans throughout the world's history, these deliberations often seem to have been clouded by factors such as socially based ideological biases and inherent cognitive biases. In my own search after the truth I have found that certain mathematical, scientific, and other ideas - in other words, the vast accumulation of structures of thought that has appeared only so late in human history - are helpful if not indispensable as inspiration, guidance and fodder for a nevertheless logically derivable understanding.

Now, in order to answer the question of what knowledge is, one must note that knowledge is at its fundamental level an application of truth. Perhaps the best definition of having knowledge is being able to apply a truth to a hypothetical circumstance, even be it as indirectly as apply the truth about the foundation of the universe to a question about how it came to be. Because, for a mere truth to exist is trivial, truth is existence, it must be accessed for it to be under the umbrella of consciousness, and access is an application. Knowledge, like truth and existence, boils down to structure (or at least our ideas must necessarily, if not the universe itself totally, though it too necessarily does to at least some degree if our ideas have any relationship to it).

I would like to preemptively define knowledge, or rather extend the definition I already gave, as the possession of an abstraction which unfailingly or necessarily applies to a circumstance. Thus, bear in mind that knowledge is a "potential" phenomenon. It is inconceivable that any intelligence but God himself, if he is interpreted to be the universe itself, could bear in mind every detail of anything. And because every event within the realm of experience of our universe is connected to every other, abstraction is essential to compact knowledge.

Furthermore, abstraction is a necessary part of any conscious exercise that relates to a matter of greater magnitude than the intelligence considering it; it is the key which allows the finite being to consider things which are increasingly removed from its own realm of experience (whether the specifics are re-established differently - applying knowledge, or the understanding remains abstract). Moreover, even in matters of lesser magnitude, hypothetically, one may not gather perfect knowledge observationally, as duplication of information is impossible in a coherent universe.¹

The difficulty in knowing is in knowing either that or how one knows something, which can easily become a circular argument. As such, one may approach knowledge with probability as science does, based on imperfect observation of an assumed regular universe - observed but not necessarily true, or, one may construe potential knowledge, which is necessarily true but not necessarily observed.

* For the philosophy midterm.

1 Kosmorsky, post to online philosophy forum.

Now, either the part of a being capable of knowledge, which bearing in mind is essentially an abstraction anyway, is infinite or finite in nature, and it seems probable that it is finite² and therefore there will always be things it cannot know: direct human understanding would be within a certain range of possibilities, meaning that the laws of our understanding are liable to be as much a result of our own limitations as the laws of the universe itself, if there is one and it has laws.

One could plunge into solipsism at that point, but that would be a major diversion, but even if that's the case those laws should be relatively simple to resolve provided one accounts for the increasing demand of the amount of information of theory itself on the organism theorising upon itself, or in the best case nested fractals of truth, to be zoomed in on as one needs, or truth as the ability to construct truth according to more compact instructions, at least truth in terms of those limitations etc.

If the that part of the hypothetical being is somehow infinite in scope, then, while one is almost bound to get into trouble dealing with infinities, it would seem reasonable that knowing could manifest directly to us through "gnosis". That case would open the question of whether abstraction is necessarily a component of knowledge, but with all these infinities piling up, one's ability to express whatever truth there may be to the idea of our infinite-nature through the abstractive mechanisms we communicate by is lost, unless abstraction itself is part of that understanding, which would be the question anyway. Which is to say, if I'm wrong about abstraction there would be nothing to replace the idea, but not to say further discussion would be useless, metaphorically one can still write the equation for dividing by zero.

But really, the most important consideration of the question of knowledge, is what is there that we might know? The question, what is truth? I'm afraid that for now I must ignore the issue of what there is that a human simply cannot conceive of for the purpose of these deliberations. I will however proceed with the nice, simple assumption that something exists and that we're part of it³, and it is my opinion that from that assumption a great deal may be deduced.

So, in order for the concept of truth itself to be useful to a conscious mind such as you or me, it must be accessible through either reason, observation, or both. The simplest and most useful definition of truth is existence, which of course necessitates the question of what existence is. The superficial tautology is a plausible explanation, and can be expanded by saying that existence is an irreducible phenomenon, or perhaps more accurately that the idea of existence is irreducible.

There are other ways of trying to define it, such as that all existence arises from necessity⁴ however in any case the issue of the first cause unfailingly appears. Two solutions to the question of first cause are readily apparent, and are conceivably the only possibilities: passing the buck to "God" which is a historical favorite, and the notion that the foundation of ultimate truth is entirely potential⁵.

2 *Phineas Gage*, steel spike through the brain. (See also, *lobotomies* and *drugs*.)

3 "Cogito ergo sum." [which is essentially the same hypothesis] *Rene Descartes*, *Meditations*

4 "There's nothing you can do that can't be done." *John Lennon*, *All You Need Is Love*

5 "Nothing is real." *John Lennon*, *Strawberry Fields Forever*

Obviously, nothing is worth considering that is entirely unrelated, indeed nothing can be considered that is entirely unrelated. This is all too obvious in human terms, but consider that even "universally", for any interaction to occur there must be a common factor or some relation along an identity: to bear no relation at all is essentially a removal from existence. Leibniz asserts that the material universe arises from an infinitude of irreducible and different existences which he calls "monads" however he also ascribes their commonality to none other than "God" (who need not be an absurdly personal intelligence) - thus what seems to be an exception to this concept is in fact its most profound and extreme embodiment.⁶

The only escape from this reasoning is to reject reason itself, which is, to accept the existence of the random. In the most extreme example of that case, reason, logic, etc. are merely apparent, "statistical" phenomena. Certainly there is no level of observation which would suitably disprove this notion, for beneath each stratus of order could be lurking the foment of chaos, and as an idea it is beyond reproach. Likewise, no appearance of chaos would suitably dispell the possibility of pervasive order. Though the essential nihilism of this idea seems to imply futility in further analysis, given the existence of the appearance of order, such analysis might be fruitful, and has not as far as I know been performed as such.

Let's propose a middleground view: to accept the existence of both reason and the random on equal footing. This implies that there would be an infinitude of experiential wholes - "universes". In physics this is known as the many worlds theory. In it's simplest form it is conceptually ludicrous for the simple reason that multiple universes would be totally incomprehensible as such.

However, one might be able to construct certain dynamics of divergence and commonality in the context of a "hyperverses" which are superficially more plausible (if we excuse the proposition of objects existing in multiple universes, as well as the possibility of certain god-like entities). The type of dynamic system would be quite unstable, that would result if events of indiscriminate probability on an otherwise coherent universe were above a certain level of probability. Especially at the lower levels of random probability but in any case, most importantly, this ontology would be thoroughly arbitrary, (and it goes without saying that in a good portion of the resultant situations it would be impossible to even appear to know anything at all).

Some would prefer to simply excuse that line of reasoning by proposing an axiom to do away with such arbitrary possibilities, but I don't find this at all satisfactory. What is overlooked is that to accept the existence of the random, absolutely dictates that one accept an infinite "quantity" of randomness (metaphorically speaking, as quantity can't technically be ascribed). In other words I charge that the arbitrariness of such explanation as the many worlds theory is more the result of its arbitrary human construction than anything else. Order is specifically the result of connexion between points, it is the result of structure. Thus we can safely assume that chaos, like the chicken, came first.⁷

⁶ *Gottfried von Leibniz*, Monadology

⁷ *Tucker Reals*, Chicken Came Before the Egg: "Scientific Proof", CBS News

Thus, with the exception of chaos, the universe is a whole, which to put into solipsistic terms means that there must always be some connexion between the events of our experience. In terms of knowledge, it can be known that something can be known. In the case that this "form" is the essence of existence, what is the cause of the differentiation that implies more to existence than ouroboros eternally declaring its own existence?

Consider the first cause itself. If everything exists because it can and necessity is the rule of existence, we have in essence the same consideration as discussed previously regarding the role of randomness! Thus, as I have often pointed out, the road to the truth is convergent. At this point however I would digress to explain my views, which begin at certain mathematical reckonings. Suffice it to say what is involved is a beautiful puzzle in which on the smallest level is infinite complexity or rather randomness, and increasing in size, ever outward from the Lord's nucleation point, is increasing structure, all proceeding from the principles of order and chaos, the quintessential duality. I have even found the laws of physics as they are known, to appear to be in accord with the mathematics which I have been working out, to the rudimentary extent I have been able to do so. Thus it is said that "In the beginning, the Lord created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."⁸ And by a similar process allowed internally, I suspect a mind can even come to understand these truths intuitively.

[And I can just imagine you, Carla Payne, whispering "Oh my god." at the conclusion of these words. How poetic that would be. I laugh.]

8 Genesis [from which I have derived much inspiration]